

but he was unlucky and was unable to get that done, but he has maintained the procedural option of reconsidering that vote. I certainly hope that will happen soon.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on a separate issue, we are at a pivotal moment in the fight against COVID-19. Thanks to the leadership of this administration, our Nation has had one of the most successful vaccination efforts in the world: 340 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the United States, 80 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have been fully vaccinated—80 percent. That means the vast majority of our senior population is protected from being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19.

Yet, at this moment, there is trouble on the horizon. Case numbers across the country are ticking back up. It is important to note why. The Delta variant is spreading like wildfire among unvaccinated people. I have heard quotes from some that it is a thousand times more transmissible than the original COVID-19. And it has quickly become the dominant strain of this virus in America.

There is good news. The vaccines that we all have access to right now will stop the Delta variant in its tracks. They will save your life. With the spread of the Delta variant, the reality for Americans is quickly becoming: Get vaccinated or risk contracting a serious or deadly case of COVID-19.

As Dr. Walensky, the Director of the CDC, said last week—and I quote her—“this is quickly becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

Over the past week, we have started to see a renewed sense of urgency from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. They finally—finally—become more vocal about dispelling disinformation about the vaccines. Even FOX News has begun airing public service announcements and encouraging viewers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. I applaud them for starting to join the chorus of scientific experts, health officials, and community leaders who have been calling on Americans to protect themselves and their loved ones, because it was only a few weeks ago when a couple prime-time hosts on FOX expressed their displeasure with me personally.

I was alarmed, and said so on the floor of the Senate, by some of the ideas that Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham were pedaling. Their anti-vax rhetoric, quite simply, put their viewers and the families of their viewers at risk. We can disagree on political issues, and I am sure we will continue to do so, but we shouldn't play political games with life and death when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines.

We have seen a shift in tone recently. Some hosts on FOX, specifically Sean Hannity and Steve Doocy, now encourage their viewers to get vaccinated. At the very least, they call on them to consult with their doctors. It is a move

in the right direction, but we ought to make it clear once and for all publicly, where we can, that those who are spreading this anti-vax rhetoric are literally risking the lives of our fellow Americans.

We are seeing the good that comes from sharing the facts about vaccines and potential to save lives. As of yesterday, the 7-day average of newly vaccinated Americans is up nearly over one-third from last year week. Nearly 7 in 10 American adults have one dose of COVID vaccine. We need to keep it up.

More than 610,000 of our family members and friends and neighbors in America have died from this disease—and millions more around the world. We have the power within our hands, with vaccines, to stop this pandemic. We all have to do our part.

I want to take an opportunity to recognize something else. Disinformation is not the only reason why people are not getting vaccinated. Sadly, there is a long history of racial bias in our Nation's institutions, from education to housing, to healthcare. That history of racial bias has, understandably, led some Americans to question our institutions based on fear.

Let me first say this: Trust has to be earned.

We have a lot of work to do as a nation to address racial inequities in our healthcare system, like the fact that Black women are three times more likely than White women to die from pregnancy-related complications. Acknowledging these inequities, doing something about them, is how we can build and regain trust. That is the work we have to do.

President Biden's American Rescue Plan was an important investment in tackling health disparities. It increased funding for community outreach, expanded support for community health centers. It provided a \$1 billion investment in the National Health Service Corps to help recruit more doctors, nurses, and other health professionals from communities of color. That was a provision that I added to the bill.

At this moment, if you are still unvaccinated against COVID-19 and you have questions, reach out to a medical professional that you trust. Talk with your doctor, ask them whatever questions you wish, but make sure you have the facts on your side, because the sad truth is the pandemic has deepened the existing racial disparities in America.

Last year, there was nearly a 3-year drop in life expectancy among Black and Brown Americans—3 years. Communities of color have been three times more likely to be hospitalized, twice as likely to die from COVID. We can end this cycle of sickness and despair, but we have got to stop the spread of the new variants. So please consult a medical professional and ask about getting vaccinated.

RANSOMWARE

Madam President, on another issue, a committee we both serve on, the Sen-

ate Judiciary Committee, is going to have an important hearing tomorrow on the issue of ransomware.

For those who may be unfamiliar, ransomware is a type of malicious software that can infect a computer. If hackers attack your computer system with it, they can lock up all the data in your system and demand a ransom payment in exchange for unlocking the data. As a product of our digital age, ransomware is a relatively new threat, but it could impact any individual, business, or organization.

Many Americans had a rude awakening about this threat earlier this year, when a cyber crime syndicate used ransomware to shut down the largest petroleum pipeline in the United States: the Colonial Pipeline. That shutdown sparked a nationwide panic that had people lining up at gas stations for hours, and it put the threat of ransomware into plain view for all Americans. Perhaps someone you know has had their world turned upside down by a ransomware attack. Tomorrow, we will discuss it at length.

GUN VIOLENCE

Madam President, we begin this week with yet another devastating toll of weekend gun violence across America, including the city of Chicago. More than 70 people were shot this past weekend in Chicago. Ten died. If you remember 2 weeks ago, Fourth of July weekend, over 100 people were victims of gunshots in Chicago. In that case, 19 of them died.

It is a mass killing on a regular basis in that great city. Much of it is concentrated in sections of the city, but it is starting to spread because it is so darned easy for a person to get their hands on a gun in that city.

Shootings in Chicago have surged during the COVID pandemic. We see it happening across America. The Biden administration is taking steps in the right direction to stop this gun violence: Cracking down on untraceable ghost guns, rogue gun dealers, and these braces, this equipment that can effectively turn pistols into short-barreled rifles.

Crucially, the Department of Justice announced the launch of five firearm trafficking strike forces. Chicago is one of the cities. New York; San Francisco; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, are the others.

These strike forces will confront what I believe to be one of the most important causes of this gun violence: the illicit trafficking of guns. These strike forces will also provide support for law enforcement who are on the frontlines of fighting gun violence.

As a testament to that fact, last week, Attorney General Garland joined me in Chicago to highlight how the Justice Department is standing with our police officers and first responders. I am grateful that Attorney General Garland returned to his hometown of Chicago for this purpose. But sadly, it was a somber homecoming.

We first met with police officers and the mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot,

at the Harrison District police station. It is basically ground zero for gun violence in the city of Chicago. They demonstrated to us the brandnew technology, the amazing technology, the video cameras, the shotspotters, new technology which they are using every single day to thwart the criminals and to prove their cases when necessary. These communities and these officers are keeping us as safe as they can, but they are up against an avalanche of guns.

The grim toll of gun violence in Chicago continues to climb upward. The officers agreed with Attorney General Garland and myself, a major problem is that we have guns being illegally sold to people who never should have had them, who never would have passed a background check, convicted felons or those who are mentally unstable. This issue is more important and more significant than any single jurisdiction. It is nationwide.

Roughly, 60 percent of the guns recovered at crime scenes in Chicago originate from out of State, primarily from Indiana, but also from other States. A person can easily buy a gun from an unlicensed seller in Indiana and drive it to Chicago in a matter of minutes that very same day to resell that gun on the streets.

Why don't we do something about this? If those who own guns agree with everyone else that we ought to keep guns out of the hands of the wrong people, why can't this Congress do that simple thing to try to slow down this gun violence?

There is one more truth we must acknowledge: Gun violence isn't just about access to weapons. Too many kids in cities like Chicago face daily trauma that is making them more likely to fall into the cycle of violence.

During the Attorney General's visit to Chicago, we joined community leaders at St. Agatha Catholic Church in the Lawndale section of the city. They have developed a successful violence intervention program called READI Chicago. It is one of the many community violence intervention programs that has received financial support from this President.

While meeting with the leaders of READI Chicago, I spoke with a young man whom I will call John. He is remarkably brave. After learning his story, one cannot ignore the similarities he shares with so many other young people in the city.

He grew up in a struggling family. He sold drugs to earn money. Like many of his peers, he ended up carrying a gun and got involved with gang violence. He was arrested, convicted, and served time in prison. Then he came back to the community and wanted to start a different life. That is how he got involved with READI Chicago, where he is now a positive force for change in his home city.

It is an inspiring story, but that young man John, in his early twenties, still remains at risk. He fears that his

advocacy on behalf of this program has put crosshairs on his back in the neighborhood and that his family may even be targeted as well. Every street corner in his neighborhood, every street he crosses, comes with a risk. He has to look around constantly to see if the gang members are going to target him. But still, even under this unimaginable stress, John is looking for a new path in his life. I asked him what he wanted to do. He said he would like to apply to attend Chicago State University, which is near this area. I hope he can get there. And I hope he will be a success, but it is amazing that he still has that dream after all that he has seen.

For young people in Chicago like him, there is no quick fix. If you grew up in a family without stability and security at home, in school, or in a neighborhood, which many of us take for granted every day, it can harm your development and change the way you see the world. The CDC's landmark study on ACEs, adverse childhood experiences, tells us that exposure to trauma is linked to risk of drug use, suicide, academic struggle, and many other problems. If you are a young child experiencing this chaos, if you watch a family member get shot or violently assaulted, it leaves a scar called trauma. Trauma can stay with a child for life.

That is why violence intervention programs like READI Chicago are so important, connecting these at-risk youth with cognitive behavioral therapy, paid transitional jobs, wraparound support services, resources that support the healthy development of children who are struggling with trauma. These are the resources that will change a young person's life and set him on a better path, a path where he can discover a passionate calling and, ultimately, get back to the community.

We must invest in these long-term solutions to break cycles of violence and trauma. The bipartisan RISE from Trauma Act that I have introduced with Senator CAPITO, a Republican from West Virginia, and many colleagues, is an important step in that direction. It would provide \$5 billion that President Biden has called for in his Build Back Better agenda for community violence intervention.

We in the Senate need to take immediate steps to combat violent crime. Can't we just get together and agree that we don't want to sell firearms to people who are convicted felons? It seems so obvious, and there is such public support for it. I want my colleagues to understand that the problem of gun violence isn't confined to the city of Chicago. We have cities that are much smaller downstate that are seeing an increase in gun violence as well. It is time for us to do something about it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

MIKE ENZI

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, this weekend, we received the bad news that our friend and former colleague, Mike Enzi, was involved in a serious accident while riding his bicycle.

Mike's colleagues on both sides of the aisle were sorry enough to see him depart the Chamber and begin his well-earned next chapter just a few months ago. Mike and Diana were a fantastic Senate couple in every respect, from major legislative accomplishments to the generosity and kindness they showed to everyone from Senate staff to the pages. So I know Members on both sides of the aisle are very much thinking of Mike at this time. We pray for his health and for the entire Enzi family.

DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

Now, Madam President, on an entirely different matter, American families are anxious, and they are uneasy.

The share of Americans who feels optimistic about our country's direction has plummeted by almost 20 percent just since the springtime. As recently as early May, nearly two-thirds of Americans said they were optimistic about the direction of the country. That was the highest figure that survey had reported in 14 years, but, alas, that has plummeted. Late last week, a new survey found that optimism is now a minority position as 55 percent of Americans are pessimistic. Approval of the new administration's handling of COVID-19 has tumbled. Their handling of the economy is underwater among Independents. Fewer than 4 in 10 Americans approve of their handling of immigration, the border, or violent crime.

Unfortunately, American families have ample reason to feel this way. The end of June clocked the highest annual inflation spike in more than a decade. The Democrats' stay-home bonus to workers who remain unemployed has slowed the recovery and helped to keep workforce participation stagnant. Meanwhile, last year, as the far left put the squeeze on law enforcement funding in cities across the country, America faced a 25-percent—25-percent—increase in homicides. Then, after the Biden administration was very eager to claim ownership and spike the football on the vaccination trajectory, which they largely inherited from Republican leadership, we have now seen vaccination rates in many places plateau on what this White House has been insisting is their watch.

This turn toward pessimism is especially stunning and especially sad because President Biden took office with